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ABSTRACT

A teaching technique that leads to auditory conceptualization--the ability to determine the number and order of sounds embedded within syllables--shows promise of measurably improving the reading proficiency of children of all ability levels. Based on C. and P. Lindamood's published technique, "Auditory Discrimination in Depth," the procedure stresses the oral/kinesthetic attributes of consonant and vowel sounds. Children are taught through discovery to feel the action of the lips, tongue, and teeth in the production of each vowel and consonant sound; they then use this knowledge to aid in the encoding and decoding of syllables. Throughout, the emphasis is for children to discover each step for themselves. The orderliness of the instructional steps, plus a strong reliance on manipulative materials, allows students to develop mental images of the basic phonic system, providing the framework to which phonic skills can be related in an organized, logical, and retrievable manner. Taught to all first graders in the Arco (Idaho) Elementary School since 1974, the technique is credited with causing a dramatic rise in students' scores on the reading subtest of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills--from sixty-sixth percentile for grades two through five in 1974 to eighty-sixth percentile in 1978. Teachers have also observed great progress in the work of individual children of all ability levels. (GT)

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AUDITORY CONCEPTUALIZATION

A NEW DIMENSION TO PHONICS

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AUDITORY CONCEPTUALIZATION - A NEW DIMENSION TO PHONICS

Those who argue that "auditory skills are not sufficiently related to reading to be particularly useful for school practice",[1] may need to take another look. The addition to the curriculum of a process which goes beyond the usual activities associated with auditory skills shows promise of measurably improving reading proficiency of children of all ability levels.

Auditory skills are typically associated with the ability to hear likenesses and differences between minimal word pairs such as hat versus hot, or fat versus fan. Typical curriculum techniques and materials also tend to 'skim the surface' of the topic by concentrating on the identification of only one or two sound elements in a syllable. Students are asked to identify the initial or final consonant sound, or to identify the vowel sound. From a practical teaching standpoint, we find many students who are great in phonics, i.e. filling in the missing phoneme on the workbook page; but struggling as readers and spellers.

There is another dimension to auditory skill which goes beyond that acknowledged by those who purport to measure and develop auditory discrimination facility. This dimension is the ability to determine number and order of sounds when those sounds are imbedded within a syllable. This ability to determine not only that two syllables are different, but

to tell precisely where and how they are different and where and how they are alike can be termed auditory conceptualization or auditory conceptual function.

A small elementary school in southeastern Idaho has longitudinal test data extending back eight years to demonstate the effect on reading scores when auditory conceptualization is taught to all first graders.

The Arco Elementary School is a team teaching school serving most of the K-4 students in Butte County, Idaho. Since the population of the 2048 square mile county is only slightly more than one person per square mile, most children belong to rural residents who live on family owned farms and ranches. This stable population has helped to make more graphic the upturn in pupil reading scores during the last five years.

In 1971, when Iowa Tests of Basic Skills were first administered on a school-wide basis, the elementary school's composite scores for the reading subtest stood at the 40% for grades three through five. Adopting a coordinated reading program for all grades, providing inservice on techniques for individualizing instruction, and hiring teacher aides were improvements initiated in 1972. These improvements paid off in increased pupil performance. In October of 1974, the reading subtest scores on the ITBS averaged 66th percentile for grades two through 5.

The 66th percentile is a respectable average for a school to maintain in reading. However, 1974 marked the year that auditory conceptual training was added as an integral part of the first grade curriculum. Reading scores have taken a dramatic leap upward. The scores on the reading subtest of the ITBS for grades two through 5 at the October, 1978 testing averaged 86th percentile.

A published technique, "Auditory Discrimination in Depth", has served as the vehicle for the teaching of auditory conceptualization.[2] The program is familiar to many speech therapists and special education or reading specialists. In it many speech therapy techniques are utilized to teach phonics, andto teach it at a level more basic than that addressed by other popular phonics programs. The Arco, Idaho, adaptation of the material demonstrates that this remedial technique can be used as an integral part of basic phonics instruction for all first graders in a classroom setting. It further demonstrates that early instruction in auditory conceptual function is of value to all students; not just those who appear to be having difficulty. During 1974-1976 the first grade students at Arco were compared to a control group of students from a nearby school whose population mirrored the economic and social background of the Arco students. The Woodcock Test of Reading Mastery was administered to both groups and the t test for the difference

between two independent means was applied to pretest scores of the control and the experimental groups and to the posttest scores of the control and experimental groups. There were no significant differences between the means on any subtest for the two groups on the pretests. There was a significant difference between the means on the total posttest scores for all subtests except letter identification. Significant differences favored the Arco group. The greatest degree of significance, .001, was found on the word attack subtest of the Woodcock Test of Reading Mastery.

The oral-kinesthetic attributes of the consonant and vowel sounds are stressed when students are trained for proficiency in auditory conceptualization. Children are taught through discovery to feel the action of the lips, tongue and teeth in the production of each consonant sound. A descriptive label describing that action is applied to the consonants. The fifteen vowel sounds are taught next. Again, the action of the tongue and mouth is emphasized and descriptive labels are applied to that action.

This knowledge of the feel of the separate phonemes becomes of great benefit when the student uses that knowledge to aid in the encoding and decoding of syllables. The child is asked to feel the mouth action sequence when pronouncing a syllable. This important point, having the child feel- rather than hear, the sequence of phonemes adds another

modality to his sensory feedback systems. While the use of vision and hearing will remain as tools, the addition of this new dimension - oral feeling- to the task, increases the student's pathways for learning.

Remembering that auditory conceptualization is the ability to determine the number and order of sounds when they are imbedded in a spoken syllable, practice is afforded in the task in a unique way. Each student is given a box containing 24 blocks in six different colors. The student uses the blocks to 'spell' the syllables pronounced by the teacher. As the teacher pronounces nonsense syllables, the child places the colored blocks to show how many sounds he heard, and whether the sounds were the same or different. A different sound is shown by a different color, a repeated sound by the same color. The teacher then changes the pronounced syllable by taking away, adding, substituting, repeating, or changing the order of a sound. The students respond by adding, omitting, substituting colors, repeating colors, or shifting the position of the blocks. The use of blocks gives practice in the activities readers and spellers use to decode and encode syllables , but removes the complication of graphemes to allow concentration on the sequence of phonemes.

Throughout, the emphasis is for the child to discover each step for himself. This emphasis on the child retrieving

information from his own sensory system, helps the child to learn to operate from his own internalized information bank - to rely on himself and his knowledge. He does not have to commit to memory large amounts of totally unrelated segments of information.

The orderliness of the instructional steps, plus the high use of manipulative materials such as mouth form pictures, flannel board diagrams, and blocks, allows the student to develop a mental image of the basic phonic system of our language. This sense of regularity and substance seems to be especially important to that group of students who find math computation and reasoning easy, but reading hard. It provides the framework to which phonic skills can be related in an organized, logical, and retrievable manner. Students who are reading or are on the verge of reading at the beginning of first grade grasp the concepts as if the teaching is giving some order to things they already almost knew. These students can be expected to average a year above grade level in reading at the end of first grade. The high-risk students, some naive, some classified as retarded, can learn through auditory and oral kinesthetic means to internalize basic phonic knowledge at a level of complexity which is appropriate to their learning readiness. It provides the teacher with appropriate instructional material for mainstreamed students who are not yet ready to deal with

the complexities of phoneme-grapheme correspondances.

Since training in auditory conceptual function has been added to the basic first grade curriculum at Arco, composite reading scores for classes entering second grade have ranged from the 85th percentile to the 91st percentile on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills reading subtest each year. The reading scores hold up well in subsequent years. In 1978, the fifth grade reading composite score was at the 88th percentile, down only three percentile points from the 91st percentile they scored as entering second graders in 1975.

Having high composite reading scores is satisfying. However, more satisfying is watching the progress of the individual children. Seeing a student who was classified as retarded reading phonetically and doing written work as a second grader is satisfying. Noticing children's speech improving because of the daily attention to proper sound production is satisfying. Working with able students as they go far beyond expected first grade learnings into syllabication and possible and probable spelling patterns is satisfying. And, experiencing the interaction with children daily as they are led through discovery and through increasing competency to that stage where their phonic foundation is so intuitive that they decode and encode at an automatic level results in all the good feelings we like to associate with the word 'teacher'.

1. Geissal & Knafle, "A Linguistic View of Auditory Tests and Exercises". The Reading Teacher (Nov. 77) pp 134-141

2. Lindamood, C. and Lindamood, P. The A.D.D. Program, Auditory Discrimination in Depth. 100 Boylston St., Boston, Mass. 02116; Teaching Resources, 1969.